

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1957

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• Rachel W. Coffin, Editor •

Week of November 11, 1957

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NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Rumple"

The New York Times

November 7, 1957

The Theatre: 'Rumple'

Eddie Foy Shines in Musical at Alvin

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHILE the author is tying knots in the plot and working on some very complicated weaving, "Rumple" provides a good opportunity to enjoy Eddie Foy.

Since he has been around a long time, audiences have been enjoying him for years. But the new musical that came to the Alvin last evening has the advantage of introducing no distractions. He can be enjoyed without interruption.

In the book that Irving Phillips has assembled, Mr. Foy is cast as the chief character in a comic strip. He spends most of the evening as a kind of Puck who plays tricks on human beings. Although they cannot see him, he can see them and hear everything they say.

This is something that gives Mr. Foy no visible trouble. A short India rubberman with the strut of a braggart and a vagrant grin, he dances amiably around the stage, carrying a gaudy umbrella that beats both the rhythm and the humor. He was trained in the old school of theatrical jesting. Perhaps that accounts for an innocence of style that is so timeless and winning.

And perhaps it also accounts for the impression he gives of being detached from the main business of the show. His eyes are always wandering in the direction of the wings or the balcony after the manner of the old vaudevillian; he acknowledges the presence of an audience but he does not woo it. It is as if he would perform just as amusingly if there were no one in the house. Speaking in a small voice, he tosses his jokes away absent-mindedly as though he did not have much confidence in them.

He is right in this instance. "Rumple" is an elaborately dull show that is strangled in plot, and not distinguished musically. Although Ernest G. Schweikert, the composer, has better models than many of Broadway musicians do, he has not yet hammered out a style of his own. The lyrics by Frank Reardon are competent, and so is the choreography by Bob Hamilton and the direction of Jack Donohue. Settings by George Jenkins and costumes by Alvin Colt—workmanlike and ordinary.

Give all possible credit to the performers. Gretchen Wyler sizzles and wiggles as a hot dame with torrid songs to sing and punctuate with upper-class bumps and grinds. As a comic-strip artist suffering trauma, Stephen Douglass sings as vigorously as if he were in rude health. In the insipid part of the ingenue, Lois O'Brien behaves more intelligently than the authors.

Barbara Perry plays the part of another comic-strip character searching for a home in the company of Mr. Foy. As a cheerful nitwit, she makes a good foil for him and pleasant company for the audience. She is fortunate in one respect: she is working with a professional. For Mr.

"RUMPLE"

Musical comedy with music by Ernest G. Schweikert; lyrics by Frank Reardon; book by Irving Phillips; staged by Jack Donohue; choreography by Bob Hamilton; scenery and lighting by George Jenkins; costumes by Alvin Colt; presented by Paula Stone and Michael Sloan at the Alvin Theatre, November 6, 1957. The cast: Chief of Oblivia... Clayton Coots; Judy Marlowe... Lois O'Brien; Ginny... Ginny Perlowin; Nelson Crandal... Stephen Douglass; Kate Drew... Gretchen Wyler; Rumple... Eddie Foy; Anna... Barbara Perry; J. B. Conway... Milo Boulton; Brannigan... Ken Harvey; Barney... Jackie Warner; Dr. Wellington Winslow... Jerome Cowan

Foy's easy, rolling style, perfect timing and flowing invention are all theatre. Having made a vocation of fooling, he has learned all the rules.

Journal American

November 7, 1957

Foy Just Fabulous In Durable Musical

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE "beep" which reached our monitoring device from "Rumple," which was circling around the Alvin Theatre last night, came in pretty good. It came in loud, all right, but not always clear. However, I don't think that matters—I think it will be up there for a long time. It's durable.

For this new musical featuring the services of Eddie Foy, Gretchen Wyler and Stephen Douglass is constructed of the hardest alloys in the business.

It has whimsy; it has a tested boy-gets-girl, loses-girl, gets-girl book; it has an enormously engaging comedian and comedienne, and it has a score which, while not exciting in itself, is enough reminiscent of similar scores to be adequate.

It is produced with taste and intelligence, by Paula Stone and Mike Sloan, and I think it constitutes an agreeable evening's entertainment.

Most of the credit goes to Eddie Foy, as Rumple, a comic strip character who has been banished to "Oblivia" because the artist who draws him has suffered from a psychosomatic seizure after an automobile accident.

This wraithlike figure and his opposite number, a galloping ghostess played by Barbara Perry, are given a limited furlough to descend to the earth and induce their sponsor to return to the drawing board. Otherwise, they will be whisked back to the never-never land, a nowhere island peopled by ex-comic strip people and last-year calendar girls.

Foy is utterly engaging at all times. He and Miss Perry are permitted to roam through the premises, stealing a drink here, a kiss there, always fouling up the proceedings at their ghoulish best. There is no strict rule as to when they are visible or

audible, and it really doesn't matter. It is great good fun.

But the so-called story is double-dreary. The love life of the comic strip artist and his "intended" is pedestrian, and becomes hopelessly confused in the end. There must have been many hectic hours in smoke-filled rooms on the road, and it is a tribute to the producers and author that they achieved a finale.

Stephen Douglass, collared with the role of the cartoonist, again proves himself to be an ingratiating and virile young man with a voice. Gretchen Wyler, so good in "Silk Stockings" not long hence, is her ravishing self once more, but I was frankly disappointed in her dance numbers. Not her delivery, but the conceptions.

Lois O'Brien is a perfectly adorable and winsome ingenue, and, of course, there is nobody that can play a silly psychiatrist better than Jerome Cowan.

George Jenkins created deft and agreeable sets.

My guess is that people will like "Rumple." It is unpretentious, yet professional; the music is undistinguished yet hummable. And there is Mr. Eddie Foy.

New York Post

November 7, 1957

TWO on the By RICHARD WATTS Jr. AISLE

Musical Comedy About a Cartoon

The idea of a comic-strip character coming to life and interfering in the affairs of his creator sounds like a fresh and original one for a musical comedy. And the plan of casting Eddie Foy as the refugee from a cartoonist's imagination seems sheer inspiration. Unfortunately, though, "Rumple," which opened last night at the Alvin Theater, makes surprisingly unimaginative use of an imaginative conception, and, despite some agreeable performers and several nice songs, the result of such promise of superior entertainment is a grave disappointment.

It starts out so hopefully, too. Rumple, it seems, is a strange little figure, who resides in a sad

world of forgotten comic strips, and he is threatened with perpetual exile there if he doesn't return to earth and persuade the artist who created him to abandon his determination to give up being a cartoonist. With his wistful and charming air of other-worldliness, Mr. Foy is just the man for such a role, and his adventures among people who, in

the fashion of Mr. Coward's "Blithe Spirit," are unable to see him appear wonderfully promising.

There are other reasons for hopefulness at the start of the proceedings. Rumple is accompanied on his expedition by a friendly and somewhat amorous girl named Anna, who is another character in the same strip, and she is portrayed by Barbara Perry with a humor that matches Mr. Foy's. In addition, several of the best songs in the score by Ernest G. Schweikert occur in the opening scenes, and hint at an evening of musical attractiveness that doesn't altogether materialize. Indeed, very little of the early promise does.

For, once Rumple and his companion reach New York and set about trying to make themselves visible to the cartoonist and his sweetheart, humor, imagination and inventiveness disappear from the libretto by Irving Phillips, and the comedy becomes almost incredibly aimless and inept. The problems of the artist, who has been in an airplane accident and believes he can no longer draw, are uninteresting, despite his pretty sweetheart, and the introduction of a burlesque psychiatrist adds exactly nothing to the fun of the evening.

Musical comedies have been

known to fare pretty well despite mediocre books, but, in the case of "Rumple," the narrative is of vital importance to the entertainment, and it proves to be maddeningly ineffectual. Furthermore, despite the charm of such songs as "It's You for Me" and "In Times Like These," the score is rather unstimulating, and the lyrics are even less. As a final blow, the dances are not especially vivid or imaginative. The fine comic basis of "Rumple" remains an idea wistfully looking for a musical comedy to go with it.

With his grace, modest humor and easygoing charm, Mr. Foy is everything that Rumple should be, but he has virtually nothing of interest to do. Miss Perry is equally handicapped, and so is the bright and dynamic Gretchen Wyler in the meaningless role of an assistant to the cartoonist. As the neurotic caricaturist, Stephen Douglass sings well, while Lois O'Brien brings both a voice and personal beauty to the part of the heroine, and Jerome Cowan is lost as the psychiatrist. George Jenkins' sets are, as usual, attractive. It's a shame about "Rumple."

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 7, 1957

FIRST NIGHT REPORT WALTER KERR'S REVIEW 'Rumple'

IN the new musical comedy "Rumple," Eddie Foy plays a cartoon character who can't get himself back into the comic strip he once inhabited. In despair he throws himself headlong onto the nearest couch and cries "Maybe I'm getting old. Maybe I'm not funny. Maybe nobody loves me any more."

Nonsense: You're in the prime of life, Eddie. The best is yet to come.

Funny? Who else could draw a chalk line across the stage, forget he has drawn it, and twenty minutes later stumbles over it? Who else could unravel a girl's knitted red dress with such delicate dispatch, dance on his knees like a talented grasshopper, steal a drink by hooking an umbrella into another fel-

low's glass? Who else could go through a psychiatrist's pockets and come up with such interesting things?

Furthermore, we love you, Eddie. Now, about that show you're in.

It isn't very good, Eddie.

It's rather long on idle fantasy and rather short on working jokes. Let's agree that it's pleasant to watch you paw the ground restlessly in a place called Oblivia while a hooded figure twice your size tells you that you have just so many hours to get back into your creator's brain. (The man who draws Rumple has had his head banged up in a plane crash.)

Let's agree that it's agreeable to watch Rumple slipping

ghostlike into his boss' penthouse, dipping and gliding like a demented Rockette, in an effort to make himself visible again.

What, then? Can librettist Irving Phillips think of nothing more adventuresome than to show his fugitive little drawing opening doors invisibly, rattling typewriters while stunned people stare, wrapping long mink coats around the shoulders of girls who don't know he's there?

To answer the question, he cannot; our black-and-white phantom repeats the business in the first scene, the third scene, the fifth scene and—for all I know—the curtain call. While it's true that the sixty-sixth time our hero slaps a girl with his hat the feverish slashing is still quite funny, those other little gimmicks begin to pall early.

And there's something seriously wrong with them. Since Rumple and his platinum-blond companion from the inkwell are wholly in view while the tricks are being played, the tricks don't seem very spectacular in the first place. It's a bit like seeing "Harvey" with an actual rabbit hanging around all the time, or like watching "Topper" without the fancy photography. Where's the twist?

On to the music. It's not bad, really. Composer Ernest G. Schweikert can turn out a summer-day soft-shoe ("In Times Like These") or a moderately sassy duet ("Peculiar State of Affairs") with some lightness, though he does have trouble every time he's asked to give vivacious Gretchen Wyler something to put her hips into.

And Frank Reardon's lyrics may settle for the very familiar "Gabriel, they say, will toot his horn one day" sort of rhyming, but there's no very serious screeching of gears. Miss Wyler is personally fetching, Stephen Douglass belts out his ballads most satisfactorily, Lois O'Brien is musical-comedy pretty, Barbara Perry squeaks nicely, and Jerome Cowan has a minimum amount of trouble with a more or less inexplicable scene in a psychiatrist's lair.

But the line gags are like the sight gags: they're not quite sturdy enough to be up and around yet. "Ever hear of mink burn? Very serious: You got to treat it with money." And that's one of the better ones. Try this: "You remind me of the Venus de Milo." "You mean I'm not all there?"

"Rumple," Eddie Foy notwithstanding, is not all there.

"Rumple"—continued

Daily Mirror

November 7, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN'S THEATRE:

'Rumple!' Lacklustre Play

Wednesday evening at the Alvin, it was as though Rodgers and Hart and Hammerstein had never set new patterns for American musicals. For Paula Stone and Mike Sloan premeditated a primitive song-and-dancer there called "Rumple." At first we thought it was going to be a satire on vintage charades, but, no, it was all on the level.

When Irving Phillips, Frank Reardon and Ernest Schweikert turned this one out, they must have been overcome by atavism. They must have been dreaming of, and yearning for, the good old days when a skimpy plot, a few gags and a handful of June-moon songs often spelled success.

THEY LAUNCHED their dip into the past with a reasonably

good idea, by having a comic-strip character named Rumple, and his girl friend Anna, leave Oblivia — the horrible haven of forgotten funny-paper people like Buster Brown and Happy Hooligan — in search of the man who originally dreamed them up.

Here was a springboard for an imaginative and fantastical frolic. Unfortunately, when inspiration ran low early in the proceedings, the authors settled for stray bits from the burlesque grab-bag. Bits like having Rumple unravel a knitted dress from a shapely chorine. And putting the venerable "Crazy House" in a psychiatrist's office.

The humor is mostly of the anatomical variety, with slight gags rampant.

There's a tenuous thread of romance running through the corn. It has to do with the plight of Rumple's creator, who's trying to marry a doll and regain his skill at the drawing board at the same time. She's the kind of cutie who decorates a honeymoon bedroom with Picasso wallpaper. That's enough to frustrate anybody.

Some top-flight performances get booby-trapped in this salute to the gay 1910's. There's Eddie Foy, Jr., who was nothing less than wonderful in "Pajama Game," struggling valiantly to put life into "Rumple." Such is his comic genius that he almost turns the trick. He can make a lot out of nothing.

GRETCHEN WYLER, as a curvaceous scripter; and Stephen

Douglass, as the handsome and harassed hero, must have been thinking of those happy days in "Damn Yankees". Miss Wyler has a pair of educated hips and tosses them around with telling effect. She can also make a tired line sound like a real nifty. As for Douglass, where could you find a better voice hereabouts?

Barbara Perry, another eyeful, is there, too, with enticing grinds and wriggles. Lois O'Brien is an orb-ionic who can sing. The perfect type for a heroine. Jerome Cowan and Milo Boulton wrestle gamely with dated material.

The settings by George Jenkins and costumes by Alvin Colt are off their bottom shelves. Ted Royal has arranged the pedestrian score, so that it may be heard across the footlights. Maybe that wasn't such a good notion. The usually reliable Jack Donohue, with an assist from choreographer Bob Hamilton, seemed bent on substituting sex for humor.

Incredible is the word for "Rumple" in this sophisticated year of 1957. It's a "Boy Friend" without the clever tongue-in-cheek touch.



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

November 7, 1957

Comics Come Gaily to Life

By FRANK ASTON.

Well, why not? We have a Russian dog whirling away in space, so why shouldn't characters from comic strips come out on the stage of the Alvin? The answer

is a musical called "Rumple," and Rumple is a man from the funny paper. He turns out to be Eddie Foy who dropped in last evening from Oblivia and immediately submitted one of his soft shoe dances in the best Foy manner.

With him came his inkwell companion, the luscious, comical Barbara Perry, wearing little more than net tights.

Being invisible to everyone on stage except the tunelessly competent Stephen Douglass, their creator, the two spent a prankish

evening causing doors to open, typewriters to type, liquor to be poured, girls to be caressed, a mink coat to wriggle, a lady's wool skirt to ravel away, a nasty editor to turn sentimental and—but that gives some idea.

Irving Phillips' book is built basically to follow the leprechaun line, but it veers violently from whimsy at regular intervals to robust lines about sex and money. This, presumably, is writing for the sophisticated trade, whatever that is. At any rate, Mr. Phillips or someone rates a big hand for the foolery of having Mr. Foy rifle the pockets of a psychiatrist, supremely well played by Jerome Cowan.

"Rumple" has whammy galore, and the gal with the most wham is Gretchen Wyler who, as is her custom, held your emissary numb in ecstasy over the vigor and grace of her dancing, the muscle in her singing. He also grew spell-bound over a singing blonde named Lois O'Brien who looked exactly like a singing blonde. In fact, all the girls are the kind men enjoy beholding.

Threaded through the wisecracks, singing, dancing and inspired screwiness is a story of how an artist, after losing his knack in an airplane crash, is restored to drawing board and girl by two escapees from his strip. It is lavishly mounted and the coloring of costumes brings peace to the eye. Jack Donohue's direction keeps it whizzing.

While the Schweikert tunes may sound reminiscent at times they are thoroughly civilized, as are the Reardon lyrics. "It's You for Me" and "How Do You Say Goodbye" are charming, and "To Adjust Is a Must" is a merry spoof of head feeling as practiced by Mr. Cowan.

And there's always Eddie Foy, playing pixie. You may promise yourself a whopping good time.

DAILY NEWS

November 7, 1957

'Rumple' Is a Charming Musical With Eddie Foy and Good Lyrics

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Rumple," which opened last evening at the Alvin Theatre, is a charming, tasteful, handsome and gently nutty musical comedy in which Eddie Foy and Barbara

Perry play two comic-strip characters who are invisible to everybody but you and me. This is all right by me and should be by you, for Foy is a very funny man in a slick and slouchy way, and Miss Perry is the kind of girl one would draw on a wall of a telephone booth if one could draw.

The story of "Rumple," written by Irving Phillips, seems to be a combination of "Topper" and "Finian's Rainbow." We have Stephen Douglass, a big he-man

baritone, in the role of a cartoonist, and he has run into a mental block and can't draw any more. This leaves his two characters, Foy and Miss Perry, faced by oblivion. If he can't draw them they aren't even dead—they are just gone.

The Nick of Time

So Foy and Perry try to get Douglass going again. With the help of all the fittings of a musi-

cal comedy—songs, dances, pretty girls and a reasonable amount of sex—if there is any such thing as a reasonable amount—they do manage to get the great cartoonist back on the beam in the nick of time. In musical comedy, the nick of time is as deep as the Grand Canyon and as wide as the Nile . . . but who would like it otherwise?

It is fine fun to watch Foy, dressed like a drawing in India ink, patting a girl when he is invisible or stuffing a banana peel into the kerchief pocket of a psychoanalyst. It is fun to watch him and Miss Perry take over the

theatre with a simple, quiet dance. It is so easy to be good when you're good.

Excellent Lyrics

It also is helpful to have adequate playmates in an ambitious musical. "Rumple" offers Gretchen Wyler in sexy songs and dances, Jerome Cowan as a befuddled wig-picker, Lois O'Brien as a marshmallow ingenue and a group of able dancers. The dances, incidentally, are better than routine and have been staged by Bob Hamilton.

There have been more musicals without songs than with. The songs of "Rumple," like "How Do You Say Goodbye," are by two newcomers — composer Ernest Schweikert and lyricist Frank Reardon. They are decidedly on the "with" side, and Reardon's lyrics have an ease and clarity one does not often find these days if Oscar Hammerstein isn't writing them.

"Rumple" is a warm and pleasant show, and a handsome one with its settings by George K. Jenkins and its costumes by Alvin Colt.

"Fair Game"

Daily Mirror

November 3, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN'S THEATRE

'Fair Game' Is a Hit, Levene's a Scream

When it looked as though this semester would never bring forth a click comedy, up popped "Fair Game" at the Longacre. It's a show tailored for laughs, and ingratiatingly unpretentious. Its aim is to entertain, not to educate, and yet it has a sound philosophy beneath its chuckles.

Sam Locke is telling the tale of a young divorcee who takes a job as a model in the garment district, to earn the money for night courses at City College. Majoring in psychology, she's smart enough to know that a grass widow is considered fair game in the battle of the sexes.

IN THE END, after she has been wine and dined by most of the town's wolves, she elopes to Greenwich with an ambitious salesman who's tired of living in hotels and on trains, when he isn't dishing out telephone numbers to pals. She figures he's the only guy in the lot who

really loves her.

This time out, Locke is working with sure-fire materials. He's dipped into the same rich mine of guffaw gold from which "The Fifth Season" and "The Gold Diggers" were dug. "Fair Game" is loaded with crackling wisecracks, bodies beautiful and a goodly measure of heart. There's a payoff parlay on our dope sheet.

But, being a canny producer who wants his entry to get a terrific ride, Joseph M. Hyman has called in Sam Levene to wear his silks. Sam proves himself the Arcaro of comedians in booting this baby home. As a ladies' wear tycoon — master of pent-

house with two terraces and two poodles, two Cadillacs, and a villa in Bermuda — he's a cunning lupe.

Like wine, Levene improves with the years. He's, always turned in sock performances, but, in this instance, he's really superb. He makes his swiveling eyes speak like words, his expressive shoulders run the gamut of emotions, his hands convey a world of frustration by an outward push or a drop.

A MINOR FAULT with "Fair Game" is that there isn't enough Levene in the second act. And there could easily be, when gorgeous Ellen McRae (the culture coveting chick) discovers that Hugh Reilly (her psychology prof) is just as lecherous as the boys on Seventh Ave. What a spot for Sam to bring the curtain down on a roar with the observation that wolves prowl college campuses as well as the show-rooms of the dress business.

Robert Webber is excellent as the salesman willing to forsake chasing for the right gal. Sally Gracie is hilarious as a hep dame. Salutes also should go to Herbert Evers, Diana Millay, Joseph Leon and Shirley Ballard for their contributions to this riotous fun fest.

Paul Roberts has directed the proceedings with a knowing eye. Frederick Fox has designed clever settings, and Robert Mackintosh a fashion show for the femmes.

"FAIR GAME"

Comedy in three acts and eight scenes by Sam Locke; staged by Paul Roberts; settings by Frederick Fox; costumes by Robert Mackintosh; presented by Joseph M. Hyman at the Longacre Theatre, November 2, 1957. The cast: Harry Bohlman . . . Robert Webber Lucille Bohlman . . . Mary Alice Bayh Susan Hammarlee . . . Ellen McRae Lou Winkler . . . Sam Levene Walter . . . Ed Bryce Arlene . . . Sally Gracie Irene . . . Shirley Ballard Janet . . . Diana Millay Speed Meyers . . . Joseph Leon Prof. Spencer Thornton . . . Hugh Reilly

Marian Thornton . . . Sarah Cunningham Rush Potter . . . Earl George Second Waiter . . . Paul Marin Frank Salinder . . . Herbert Evers

Though the firm that provided the men's wardrobes isn't programed, it should be. They look like the latest from Byron Goldman's GGG atelier.

In our book, lucky ticket holders will be winners at "Fair Game." How can they lose, with Sam Levene playing along with them at the entertainment table? He's wonderful, just wonderful! What a host to have at a fast and furious frolic? At last—A Hit! A Hit! A Hit!

"Fair Game"—continued

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

November 4, 1957

—FIRST NIGHT REPORT— WALTER KERR'S REVIEW 'Fair Game'

I HAVE a suggestion. Just pick out all of Sam Levene's scenes in "Fair Game" and play 'em twice. That way you'll have a really nice show.

Mr. Levene is appearing at the Longacre as a sort of garment-district Mephistopheles, a wolf in men's clothing, a proud fellow who resents being called "an old lecher" because he is no more than forty-eight years old.

He brings great spiritual depths to every facet of the role. Injury becomes him. The horror with which he recoils from an available girl who doesn't want a mink stole, just

money, is outraged virtue in its essence. Mr. Levene cannot bear to see good taste violated.

He is a great man for philosophy when things aren't going well. "Penthouses, Cadillacs, a place in Bermuda—what does it all mean?" he cries, wringing his pale hands in anguish and shutting his eyes against the appalling materialism of the contemporary world.

Open-eyed, he is even better. There is a certain predatory sparkle that comes into his wrinkled and beaming countenance at the first scene of prey that shimmers and glistens like a battery of drunken glow-

worms. And yet it is as nothing beside the simple, evil appeal of his lamb-like suffering when his plans are thwarted, the agony that rends him when he thinks of virtuous women, unworn fur coats, his fat wife, and folk dancing.

The powers of this performer extend well beyond the genteel flourish of his worn-down cigar, the arc that his fingers make as they knead invisible dough, the upraised arm that calls for silence in a manner Cicero might have envied. They extend, in point of fact, to some pretty so-so dialogue, raising it to the level of bright comic literature.

"That's not Chicago, that's the ladies' room" isn't exactly Oliver Goldsmith or John Millington Synge. When Mr. Levene says it, it has class. Well, at least it's funny. If someone snarls at him, "Can't you tell the difference between a nice girl and a tramp?" and he mutters, "It gets tougher all the time," that's good, too. The artist, working with the nervous energy of a ribald terrier and the leonine aplomb of a David Belsaco, is in such happy, carefree, altogether svelte command that you don't ask questions, you just grin—and wait for him to come pop-

ping back through another apartment door.

Of course, he's off about half of the time, and this is author Sam Locke's most serious lapse. Not that the other players are precisely inferior: Ellen McRae is a pretty thing for any man to be pursuing (she's a divorcee, which means that New York males look upon her "like free bread in a restaurant"); Robert Webber is brisk and believable as a salesman newly sold on virtue; Hugh Reilly is funny as a poetic psychologist, and Sally Gracie helps things out by laughing like a rooster with hiccoughs.

Trouble is, the lines go limp when Mr. Levene isn't around to lend them his goatish majesty, and the evening's single-minded premise eventually turns into a kind of dramatic revolving door. That is to say, "Fair Game" proposes that all men behave in precisely the same way when confronted with a morsel freshly detached from her husband, and it then goes on to show all of them behaving in just that way. Since the girl's spots never change, either, the pattern becomes as repetitious as wallpaper. About as thin, too.

Twins, that's what Mr. Levene should have been.

New York Post

November 4, 1957

TWO on the By RICHARD WATTS Jr. AISLE

Sam Levene and an Engaging Comedy

Remember how good Sam Levene was in "Guys and Dolls"? Well, he's even better in "Fair Game." This in itself would give Sam Locke's comedy, which opened Saturday night at the Longacre Theater, a fine head start toward success. And since the engaging new play has a number of

other virtues, including a general air of humorous brightness, some sharp observations on the problems of being a beautiful young divorcee, and a delightful performance by a lovely newcomer named Ellen McRae, I'll be startled if it doesn't have the vast popularity it deserves.

It may give you an idea of "Fair Game" to describe it as a "The Moon Is Blue" of the gar-

ment district. I would also be tempted to compare it to "The Fifth Season" if it didn't seem to me several hundred times superior to that dire but popular comedy about the same industry. To be more specific, it tells with humor and surprising charm of a girl who comes to New York to study psychology at City College, because her idiot husband had

deserted her for not being his intellectual equal, and finds herself battling the local wolves, young and old.

The Thesis

I suppose it could be charged against Mr. Locke's comedy that it is slightly ramshackle and mechanical in its structure, and perhaps a little obvious. But this, even if you admit it, is far more than counterbalanced by the wisdom of its humor. "Fair Game" is, of all things, a thesis play. Its thesis is that a young divorcee, alone in New York, won't be alone long, since all the amorous males, to use a redundancy, will soon be in hot pursuit, regarding her as fair and willing game. And the case is documented with a skill as comic as it is accurate.

What part, I hope you are asking, does Mr. Levene play in this educational comedy? On the side, he is a rich garment manufacturer, but his real life's work is the pursuit of pulchritude. All of us have long known what a brilliant comedian he is, but not ever his unforgettable Nathan Detroit has more than suggested the almost incredible hilarity of this performance. He is magnificently funny in his baffled exasperation, but he is also warm, real, immensely sympathetic, and tremendously charming. And wait until you see

him dash to the rescue of a mink coat!

The Pursued

As for Miss McRae, she is bound to be the latest rage, and desperate measures should be taken at once to keep her from being spirited away to the movies. She has beauty, grace, sweetness, natural charm and, come to think of it, a figure, but she also has humor, poise and a genuine gift for appealing characterization. Playing a naive young woman, who fights off the men attracted by her looks, she has the skill to show that the innocence is not that of a nitwit and she never makes her resistance to the hunters seem either coy or priggish.

The performances in the lesser roles are excellent, too. In the role of a younger wolf who eventually sees the way of true love, Robert Webber has the talent to make both phases of the character believable. In addition, I want to single out for attention the brief appearances of Joseph Leon, as an especially hearty pursuer of the fair game, and Mary Alice Bayh, as a girl rushing to Venezuela and matrimony. With its observant and likeable humor spurred on by Miss McRae's appeal and Mr. Levene's comic magnificence, I can't see how "Fair Game" can miss.

DAILY NEWS

November 4, 1957

Sam Levene and a New Girl Do Entertaining Job in 'Fair Game'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Sam Levene is one of the smoothest, sharpest and most likable of all our comedians. Ellen McRae, a willowy young Detroitier, is the most refreshing and attractive ingenue to have come to Broadway in quite a spell. These two, with several affable playmates, make a very entertaining evening out of "Fair Game."

This comedy by Sam Locke, which was presented at the Longacre Theatre Saturday evening, concerns a girl who ventures among wolves in ladies' clothing—the men who purvey dress goods. Since she is not a maiden but a divorcee, she is considered

fair game. Being a big girl with a strong right and a strong mind, she fends off all passes, modeling clothes for Levene by day and studying psychology at City College by night.

Something to See

A few seasons back there was a horror of a comedy about the garment business, "The Fifth Season," which ran and ran just to spite me. "Fair Game" is a

lot better, being funnier and not so cheap. Being about women's wear it does present Miss McRae and other attractive sylphs in various samples of toggery, starting with the basic brassiere, but it goes about its modeling modestly. And wait until you see Miss McRae in her slinky black gown in the third act! Oh, well, she was a model and a cover girl before she went on the stage—and she has taken to the stage with perfect ease.

Perfect ease is what Levene has most of. He sets about his wolfish pursuit with the utmost cunning, and every time he gets a rebuff he tries another devilish

tack. What makes him so funny in anything he does is the absolute sincerity with which he plays. No matter how light or comic the role, he plays it as honestly as though it were Richard Second—and he is a master of timing, right down to the twitch of a brow or the pop of an eye. I was almost sorry he didn't get the girl, but in the theatre virtue must be rewarded and she gets the right man, who is very well played by Robert Webber.

Many Scenes

Not all the wolves who are after Miss McRae are cloak-and-suiters; one of them, and quite amusing as he is played by Hugh Reilly, is a stuffy psychology professor. Among other helpers in the comedy are Sally Gracie as a slightly shopworn model and Joseph Leon as a go-get-her.

The play has been brightly directed by Paul Roberts, and Frederick Fox has spread himself on scenery, running up such places as a flossy restaurant, a steak house, a couple of powder rooms, a shop dressing room, a bookworm's study and a modest apartment for Miss McRae.

Journal American

November 4, 1957

One Sam Levene—Play Needs More

By JOHN McCLAIN

SAM LEVENE is certainly one of our most artful comics—master of the slow burn, the despairing shrug, and a full professor of timing and eyebrow acting—but I'm afraid even his best efforts are not enough to overcome an item called "Fair Game," which opened Saturday night at the Longacre Theatre. He actually does win you in the end, but unfortunately you have had to put up with too much dementia in the interim.

This new comedy by Sam Locke gets off to about as deplorable a start as could be imagined. A ravishing young lady, recently divorced, has come to New York to get a job and enroll in a night course in psychology at CCNY. The job presses her into service as a model in the garment establishment owned by Mr. Levene, and so we have a comic situation. To complete her college research, using only first-hand information, she is led into complications with various young men and, finally, Mr. Levene.

There's nothing much wrong with this idea, but here it takes an interminable time to get

under way. The actual planting of the characters is deadly.

and Mr. Levene and the heavy artillery don't arrive until late in the First Act. By this time the ennui is enormous.

Matchless Talents

The eventual triumph of Mr. Levene and his inordinate charm is achieved by slowly beating the audience into belief with a large, blunt instrument. Once with us, he takes charge and seldom lets us go.

It follows very much the pattern of "Middle of the Night," the success of last season in which Edward G. Robinson became helplessly involved with a much younger woman. In this one it is of course played entirely for comedy, but the ingredients are the same.

That he can keep the customers in the seats is a tribute to Mr. Levene's matchless talents, for the script is far from notable. There is the proposed trip to Bermuda, the offer of the mink coat, the penthouse, the Cadillac, etc. Sam almost, but not quite, makes it all attractive.

A Losing Battle

With him is a highly decorative newcomer named Ellen McRae, who is also quite a good actress. She, too, fights a losing battle, but she puts up a game struggle and will probably be heard from importantly elsewhere. Robert Webber plays The Boy. Through no fault of his, he is left at the post but redeems himself in later scenes and establishes the fact that he knows his business.

Frederick Fox has come through with a brilliant and complex arrangement of sets, and I thought Paul Roberts' direction was acceptable—if less than inspirational.

In "Fair Game" we have one of those battles-to-the-death between an extremely capable performer, Mr. Levene, and an inadequate comedy. I'm afraid that despite a powerful effort the decision is against him.